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UNCLAS KINSHASA 000464

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPT FOR G/IWI (L. Khadiagala)
DEPT FOR AF

E.O. 12958; NA

TAGS: [ECON](#) [ELAB](#) [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [SCUL](#) [SOCI](#) [CG](#)

SUBJECT: DR CONGO: CHILD MARRIAGE EXISTS

REF: STATE 36341

1. (SBU) Response is keyed to reftel.

Begin response:

A) The legal age of marriage is 15 for girls and 18 for boys. The government is revising the family code, and experts believe the legal age of marriage for girls will be raised to 18. There is not a lower legal age for marriage with parental consent.

B) Underage marriage for girls is widely accepted in the DRC, and in many rural areas a significant number of girls get married as early as 13. Dowry payments greatly contribute to underage marriage and create a vicious circle for many families. For example, in some cases, parents marry off a young daughter against her wishes in order to collect dowry payments to finance a son's dowry payment to his future wife so he can get married.

According to a 2001 UNICEF study, the average age of first marriage for males was 26.0 (28.7 in urban areas and 24.9 in rural areas). The average age of first marriage for females was 21.0 (21.0 in urban areas and 20.1 in rural areas). Nearly 97.5% of males aged 15-19 are single (98.6% in urban areas and 96.8% in rural areas). Only 76.7% of females aged 15-19 are single (81.9% in urban areas and 76.7% in rural areas).

C) Underage marriage adversely affects the well-being of girls because it limits their access to education, and often leads to unsafe pregnancies or multiple pregnancies during teenage years.

Although the U.S. does not directly fund initiatives to address child marriage, USAID has family planning programs and HIV/AIDs awareness programs that promote abstinence and waiting until maturity to engage in sex or get married. USAID partners, including organizations that work with street children, also educate families and communities about the importance of keeping girls in school and taking care of their children. USAID does not have concrete data about whether these programs reduce the incidence of child marriage.

End response.

MEECE